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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 000198

SIPDIS

WHA FOR A/S SHANNON AND DAS ROBINSON; VCJCS FOR GEN.
CARTWRIGHT; OSD FOR A/S BENKERT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/05/2019

TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: HIGH-LEVEL USG REPRESENTATION AT OIF
SERVICE RECOGNITION CEREMONY REINFORCES TIES WITH GOES AND
ESAF

REF: SAN SALVADOR 164

Classified By: Charge Blau for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A high-level USG delegation, headed by VCJCS Gen. Cartwright and OSD A/S Benkert, traveled to El Salvador Feb.27-28 to participate in a ceremony commemorating El Salvador's participation in OIF. In addition to expressing gratitude for El Salvador's contributions in Iraq, USG representation at this event reinforced bilateral ties with the government of El Salvador (GOES) and strengthened institutional linkages with the Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF). The presence of VCJCS Cartwright, as well as OSD A/S Benkert and LT Generals Allen and Spears also facilitated discussion of possible Salvadoran participation in OEF (Afghanistan), and extension of U.S. access to the Forward Operating Location (FOL) at Comalapa. End summary.

¶2. (C) The two day visit afforded the U.S. delegation numerous opportunities to engage key GOES and ESAF interlocutors, as well as to gain a better understanding of U.S. operations on the ground in El Salvador. The program afforded opportunities for the U.S. delegation to visit the Comalapa Forward Operating Location (FOL) and receive a briefing on DOD involvement in regional maritime and air narcotics interdiction. Minister of Defense Jorge Molina on February 27 briefed U.S. counterparts on Salvadoran military capabilities, particularly humanitarian assistance missions, as well as the ESAF's desire to participate in international peacekeeping operations.

¶3. (U) The OIF recognition ceremony took center stage on February 28. Before a crowd of roughly 15,000 people assembled at a San Salvador soccer stadium, Salvadoran President Antonio Elias "Tony" Saca presided over a ceremony in honor of the Cuscatlan Battalion, i.e. the Salvadoran contingents that served in Iraq. Over 3,500 Salvadoran soldiers served in 11 rotations, from 2003-2008. Highlights of the ceremony included a moment of silence for the five Salvadoran soldiers that were killed while serving in Iraq, as well as General Cartwright's remarks on behalf of the U.S. The OIF service recognition ceremony generated substantial media coverage, including front page stories in all the major newspapers.

¶4. (C) Comment: In addition to publicly expressing U.S. thanks for Salvadoran support to OIF, the high-level USG delegation also facilitated forward progress on two important fronts: possible ESAF participation in Afghanistan, and extension of the Comalapa FOL agreement. How we move either

of these issues will depend on the results of El Salvador's
March 15 Presidential elections. End comment.
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